



AN
EPISTLE
TO THE
CHURCHES
OF THE
ANABAPTISTS
SO CALLED.

*Written by a Member of the CHURCH, and sent abroad in pur-
suance of a printed paper from TIVERTON, directed
to all the CHURCHES of
JESUS CHRIST.*

Friends,



Am constrained with compassion to the oppressed seed in you, which groans to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the sons of God, and likewise enjoined as a member of the Church of Christ, in bowels of love and tenderness, to write unto you, which I hope will be profitable to such as are earnestly coveting after the best things, though for the present many of you are scattered upon the barren mountains as sheep without a Shepherd, and wandering in the wilderness in a darke and solitary way; *He that hath an eare so hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches;* and to the Pastors and Teachers of your Churches write I these things, in the name and fear of the Lord, before whom your works have not been found perfect; for you have had a name to live,

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while death hath reigned over many of you; the day is far spent, and the shadows of the evening are stretched forth, and the night cometh wherein no man can work: therefore repent, and while you have the light, believe in the light, and bring all your deeds to the light, to be proved and tryed, that they may be wrought in God; and neglect not the great salvation which now is begun to be spoken of in these last dayes, wherein iniquity hath abounded, and the man of sin hath been exalted, and the love of many hath waxen cold, who in words profess they know God, and in works deny him; the Spirit of the Lord strives with you as it did with the children of disobedience in the dayes of *Noah*; and the baptism that now saves us is not onely the putting away of the filth of the flesh, (and carnal washings) but the answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of *Iesus Christ*, who is come a Light into the world, and by the brightnesse of his rising (in the hearts of his people) doth he reveal the man of sin, and the mysterie of iniquity, with the abomination that was spoken of by the Prophet, which hath been exalted among you, and yet stands where it ought not: And now the Law is changed, and the Priesthood changed, and the carnal Ordinances are to cease, and the Covenant, which made not the comers thereunto perfect; for the weaknesse and unprofitableness of it is done away, and the Hand-writing of Ordinances blotted out, and *Christ Iesus* the Mediator of the new Covenant witnessed, who is the Head of the Church, the everlasting Teacher of his people, the High-Priest and Apostle of our profession, the chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, and they that are with him, are called, and chosen, and faithful, and circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by the putting off the body of the sinnes of the flesh, buried with him in baptism, and quickned together with him by the faith of the operation of that eternal Spirit that raised up *Iesus* from the dead: And they onely are Members of his Church that are thus made conformable to him in his death, and quickned together with him, and raised up by the power of his resurrection, and such cannot be subject to the worlds worships, customs and fashions, nor to its Ordinances, as those are who live in the world. Therefore touch not, take not, handle not those things which perisheth with the using, and doth not make the comers thereunto perfect: Secke not the living among the dead and carnal Ordinances, and bodily-exercises, which are altogether unprofitable; and according to the tradition received from men, for the kingdom of God cometh not with observations. Arise, arise, for this is not your rest because it is polluted: God who commanded light to shine out of darknesse, hath shined in our hearts to give us the knowledge of his glorious Gospel in the face of *Iesus Christ*, whom he hath sent forth in these last dayes for a light unto the Gentiles, a Leader of his people, and for salvation to all the ends of the earth; who comes to be glorified in his Saints, and who is to be worshipped in the spirit, and in the truth, and they that do not worship

worship him in the spirit and in the truth, they worship they know not what, even the unknown God ignorantly, and such are not the Church of Christ, what ever they professe.

Lately I saw printed Epistle, signed by Thomas Collier and others, wherein your condition in some measure was expressed and confessed; and truly, mine eye affects my heart at the consideration thereof; I cannot but bewaile those great abominations by which the Lord God Almighty, of power and purity, is provoked to jealousy, and even to give you up to strong delusions, to observe lying vanities, because you like not to retain God in your knowledge, since that which may be known of him is manifested in you, as hath (both in word and writing) been freely declared to many of you; and yet this feat of the Image of jealousy remains among you, and the accursed thing which makes you fall before your enemies, and renders you uncomely in the sight of men, as you have confessed.

Now friends I must deal plainly with you, that a separation may be made between the precious and the vile, the holy and the prophane, that they who are of the Synagogue of Satan, may be delivered unto Satan; for as their blasphemy was known that said they were Jewes and were not, so their presumption is now seen that call themselves the Church of Christ, and are not: Being moved of the Lord, I cannot but give in my Testimony as a Misse into his everlasting treasury, by declaring plainly unto you, That you are not in reality and truth what you professe to be, and as the Direction or Preface to that Epistle bespeake you; for the Church is as a Lilly among Thorns, (in relation to your condition therein express) or as an Apple-Tree among the Trees of the Wood, and is builded upon the foundation of many Generations, being living Stones, elect, and precious; and with the love of Christ, who is the Head of his Church, his members are constrained to follow him, as the Captain of their salvation, in honor, and dishonor; in good report, and evil report; liberty, and bonds, persecutions, and tribulations; and because of the favour of his good Oynments, the Virgins, his followers, loves him dearly, yea above all the worlds glory and friendship, and the love of the world hath not, nor never can be able, (like a Cancer) to eat out their affections to the Lord Iesus, as you have confessed in your Epistle, concerning them to whom it was sent, with whom you say, it is on your hearts to live and dye.

You say you have been arraigning the abominations of Zion before the Bar of the Most high: But upon search it is found to be your own, and your Churches abominations, for you say iniquity hath been apparently written upon their fore-heads; but the daughters of Zion are redeemed with judgements, and her Converts with righteousness, and they that stand with the Lamb upon Mount Zion, hath the Fathers Name written in their fore-heads; and they are redeemed from the earth, and in their mouths no guile is found, neither are they defiled with women, nor with the pollutions of the world; but have washed their Garments, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, having come through great tribulations, and through the washing of regenerations. Also you say

you have made confession of these reigning abominations in your selves, and in the Churches, that light spirit, that wretched worldly spirit, that coldnesse and deadnesse, that Laodicean spirit that is fallen in upon you.

Oh friends! charge not these iniquities upon Zion, nor upon the Members of the Church of Christ, who are one Spirit with him; nor put not these things afar off, but repent, and humble your selves before the Lord, and lay not these things to the Saints charge: For Zions sake, and for the Churches sake I cannot be silent, for they are not guilty of these things charged upon them; its your own condition, by your own confession; and therefore I counsel you to buy Gold tryed in the fire, that you may be rich; & white rayments, that you may be clothed; and Eye-salve, that you may come to see the things which concerns your eternal peace, which hath been long hid from your eyes whilest you have been crying up your selves as the Church of Christ, and thought you were rich, and said you saw, when indeed you were poor and miserable, blind and naked; And these things are justly fallen upon you, since you set your selves to oppose and contend against the light of Christ in the conscience, which makes manifest and reprove all things which is contrary to the will and mind of God, where it is believed in and loved. Truly your wound is almost incurable, its your iniquities that makes the separation between you and your God, and your sins that with-holds good things from you, as you are in part sensible, and have herein confessed, that the worlds glory hath bewitched you, and alienated you from the Lord. And further, That this iniquity hath been apparently written upon your fore-heads, (to wit) personal-iniquity, Congregational-iniquity, Family-iniquity, Closet-iniquity, &c. Oh what bruises and purifying sores is found among you! What a shattered building is this! no soundnesse, no zeal, without hope, without God in the world, affections to Christ eaten up, with the love thereof, rebelling against the light, cruel to servants and children, exacting all their labours; formal in holy duties, having the shadow, but not the substance; the form of godliness, but not the power thereof; the sign, but not the seal of the Covenant. Arise ye that sit in dust, awake ye that are asleep in this condition, least your Candle be put out, and the day of your visitation passe over: Light hath long shined in a dark place, and the darknesse comprehended is not: And the blind Watchmen have said, Lo here is Christ, and lo there is Christ, & have deceived many that have been inquiring after the good old way, and have told them that the light within is natural, and that the Scriptures was the Word of God: But I say unto you, Go not forth, believe them not, for they that made known the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, who were eye-witnesses of his Glory, and of his Majesty, were sent to turn people from the darknesse to the light, and from under Satans power, unto God, and declared that which they had heard, and seen, tasted of, and handled of the Word of life, which was nigh them, even in their hearts, and in their mouths, and this is the Word of Faith which we preach: And this I declare unto you by the same spirit, That we have a more sure Word of Prophecie then that which was seen in the Mount, unto which ye do well to take heed, as unto a light that shines in a darke place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts, that you may come to see the salvation of God.

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Likewise they complain of your neglect of the poor Saints, which is indeed an evil, for he that hath this worlds good, and seeth his brother have need, and shuts up his compassion against him, how dwelleth the love of God in that man? He cannot be by us owned as a Member of the *Church of Christ*: Also of your neglect of the Ministers, and remissness in Meetings, which may be excused, for the Ministers of Christ doth not murmur nor cry out of wants, nor complain in the streets, though they be sent forth many times as sheep among wolves, and persecuted from city to city, and some of them cast into prison, as it is at this day witnessed, neither need they murmur or complain, for the Lord provides food and raiment for them, and they are therewith content, and they have no Letters of recommendation, but doth in the sight of God commend themselves to that of God in every mans conscience, unto which they are made manifest. And as for your remissness in Meetings, I cannot much blame you, in regard you have profited so little by their Ministry; for had they stood in Gods counsel, your Meetings would have been for the better, and not for the worse; and that desire which hath appeared in many of you after the Lord, would have been strengthened, and your thirsty souls satisfied and refreshed, for where ever two or three are gathered together in the Name of the Lord, his presence is witnessed among them: and they that wait upon the Lord, doth daylie renew their strength, and as their eyes comes to be opened that have heaped up Teachers to themselves in the time of ignorance, they cannot but withdraw from them, though they suffer affliction with the people of God, who are all the day long accounted as sheep for the slaughter, or as men not fit to live upon the earth.

The Authors of the Epistle sent to you, hath lest things therein contained, to be farther opened by those whom the Lord hath entrusted with his Oracles: And I am enjoined, and it lyes upon me as a duty (being a Member of the *Church of Christ*) to deal plainly with you; for all you that are found guilty of the abominable iniquities, *Laodicean Spirit*, pride and cruelty, deadness, and earthly-mindedness, &c. are by the Elders of our *Church* (in the behalf of all the Members thereof) utterly denied to be of us.

Nor her can you be owned by us, nor received into fellowship with us, till you cleanse your hands, and purifie your hearts, till you wash you, and make you clean from all the pollutions of Idols, and until you repent and be baptized, for its not every one that saith, *The Temple of the Lord, The Temple of the Lord, that are the children of Abraham*: Neither is it circumcision, nor uncircumcision that availeth any thing, but a new creature, and faith which works by love, and whosoever believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved: But all that are dipt once or twice in the water, are not baptized with the baptisme of Christ, so wis, the circumcision of the heart, which is the Seal of the righteousness of faith, He that can receive it, let him, and whosoever cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God

Que, are none of the Church of Christ, neither may they be permitted to break bread with us before they be baptized with the baptism of Christ, for such doth not discern the Lords body before they own and believe in the light which was in the beginning with God, by which Enoch saw him who is invisable, and by which Abraham saw the Sons day, and rejoiced; and by which we behold his glory, as the glory of the onely begotten of the Father, who is full of grace and truth: And this is the Message that we have to declare, and which I here declare unto you, That God is light, and in him is no darknesse at all; and if you return to the light, and believe in the light, and love the light, and bring all your deeds to the light, and walk in obedience, then have you fellowship with us, and we can own you, and receive you into the Church without any Letters of Recommendation from men, and have union with you in the spirit, and so you may eat with us in our Fathers House of the Bread of Life which came down from Heaven: For the Cup of Blessing which we blesse, is the Communion of the blood of Christ; and the Bread which we breake is the Communion of the Body of Christ; for we being many, are one Bread and one Body, and they that are not baptized by one spirit into one body, are not of the Church of Christ, neither can we own them as Members thereof.

This may let you know, that by diligent search we have found you out to be one with the world in many things, as also is in your Epistle expressed, wherein you have brought forth the dry bones of your Congregations, and even spread them before the Sun in the open valley, that he that runs may read what birth is brought forth, and what image is born: Your Teachers complains of formality in holy duties, and yet confesses themselves to be guilty of the same thing: Alas! How can it be otherwise with you so long as you own such for your Teachers who hath the form of godlineffe, and not the power of it? Is not the Scripture herein fulfilled, *They ran, I never sent them, saith the Lord, therefore they shall not profit this people at all: The Leaders of my people cause them to erre, and they that are led of them are destroyed for want of knowledg; the Pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the Lord, therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flock shall be scattered*

Surely the Husbandmen begins to be ashamed of their work, and the Vine-deessers begins to weep and howle, as if the Seed were rotten under the Clods, and little fruit is brought forth to perfection, witnesseth their complaint in the forementioned Epistle, wherein they confess they have laboured in vaine, and that which hath been brought forth hath been to so little purpose: Let not these things be declared in Gath, nor published in the Streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines should pejoyce over you, for the Church of Christ doth deny such a Testimony, and such Teachers.

Therefore all you that are simple-hearted, and hungers and thirsts after righteousness, come out from amongst them, and be ye separate, lest you perish in their gain-sayings; spend not your money for that which

is no bread, and your labour for that which doth not profit, but come to the waters freely, and drink without money and without price; incline your ears, and come hearken diligently, and hear, that your souls may live, that you may eat that which is good, and be abundantly satisfied therewith; for though you played the Harlot, and destroyed your selves with many Lovers, and have been as the degenerate plant of a strange Vine to God, yet there is mercy with him that he may be feared; and he spreadeth forth his hands all the day long, saying, *Let return unto me, and I will heal your backslidings, and receive you, and love you freely, and you shall be my Sons and Daughters, saith the Lord, who is faithful and just so forgive, and so blot out all your iniquities, transgressions and sins, and so cleanse you from all filthineſſe both of the flesh and spirit.*

And now friends in your Fasts and solemn Assemblies, in order (as you say) to the purging out of sin and sinners, beware of smiting with the fist of wickedness, and take heed of judging any thing before the time; for the Pharisees fasted often, and the unbelieving Jews agreed together to cast such out of their Synagogues as confessed Christ, and they cast him out whose eyes Christ had opened.

Now there is need of sound discerning in this great work of binding and loosing, receiving in, and casting out; for the Lord is working a wonderful work, and creating a new thing in the earth, and opening the eyes of many who comes to see the end of the worlds Ordinances and will-worships, (so highly esteemed among men) and such you need not cast out, nor bring under dealing, but leave them to their freedom, to worship God in the spirit and in the truth; but let sinne and sinners be plainly dealt with, and declared against, till they confesse and forsake; and let all who are in the transgression keep silence in the Church, for we permit none to speak but as they are moved by the Holy Ghost, and take heed of despising prophesie, or quenching the spirit either in sons or daughters, servants or handmaids, for the spirits of the Prophets are subject to the Prophets, and they may all speak one by one, and if any thing be revealed to another that sits by, let the first hold his peace, that in the Church all things may be done decently and in order. And let this Epistle be read among you with the spirit, and with the understanding, and receive it with meekness, from a Member of the Church of Christ, a Companion to all that loves truth in the inward parts, who suffers persecution for the Testimony of Jesus, and the Word of God,

The third day of the tenth
Month, 1657.

THOMAS SALTFOUSE.

THE END.